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ABSTRACT

This document describes an instructional packet designed to help teachers develop effective techniques for monitoring classroom behavior. Monitoring student classroom behavior requires the possession of a meaningful set of categories with which to describe student behavior, the ability to identify examples of those behaviors in the context of classroom activity, and the ability to classify student behaviors from multiple groupings. In the package "Monitoring Classroom Behavior" three films are sequenced to create improved skill in observing and classifying student behavior. In the first film the settings are described, i.e., a third and tenth grade class engaged in art and science activities respectively. Five categories of student behavior are defined and examples of each are shown. Two goals are addressed in the second film. First, the concepts are presented in a more complex context demonstrating the difficulties inherent in classifying human behavior. Second, the trainee is asked to try to use the categories in classifying student behavior. In the third part, an attempt is made to simulate the condition in an actual classroom where a teacher may be asked to monitor the behaviors of a variety of students at the same time. (JD)

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MONITORING CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

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One of the pressing concerns reported by preservice[1] and inservice teachers, especially new teachers[2] is the area of classroom management of discipline. However, Schumm[3] and Ingersoll, Jackson and Walden[4] point out, although discipline and classroom management recur as areas of concern, little attention has been directed toward those areas in research and development in teacher education. The purpose of "Monitoring Classroom Behavior" is to respond to that needs. Specifically, these protocol materials are intended for use in developing skills appropriate to positive classroom control. Classroom control (discipline) is considered a reasonable objective for the classroom teacher and positive control need not be equated with corporal control. An effective teacher may effectively exercise control in his/her classroom by conveying an impression to the students of being an active agent in the classroom, using control as a positive component of maintaining ongoing activities.[5] Monitoring is presumed to be antecedent to positive classroom control.

Effective management of the classroom includes both (a) establishment and maintenance of a classroom climate which facilitates learning and (b) intervention when minor behavior disturbances occur, to lessen the chances of those minor disturbances from becoming "discipline problems" or major disruptions. Kounin[5] presents evidence which indicates that effective teachers use a strategy of monitoring and scanning student behaviors to insure smooth classroom functioning. The primary premise of these protocol materials is that

monitoring is a necessary presursor to effective classroom control

In general terms, to "monitor" means:

> To attend to or keep check over a situation or activity with particular reference to signs of malfunction.[6]

Translating this definition into the context of teacher behavior, to "monitoring classroom behavior" means:

> To watch over or attend to classroom events with particular attention to those categories of behavior that are related to smooth group functioning.

The effective classroom teacher monitors student behavior to maintain both a smooth classroom climate and a lack of disruption. He or she observes and classifies student behavior with particular attention to signs of trouble. Monitoring becomes the stimulus for deciding what further action is needed. In other words, monitoring forms a base on which to make decisions about appropriate intervention steps. (For further description of possible teacher interventions, see Kounin[5] and Borg[7].) Schumm[3] has shown that there are wide discrepancies in individuals' abilities to monitor more than one classroom-like event. Demands that a teacher "monitor" classroom behavior while maintaining other activities may be no small task, particularly when the teacher does not know what to monitor.

The Materials

"Monitoring Classroom Behavior" consists of an instructor's manual and three 16mm, color films. The films are sequenced to (1) present a set of categories for use in monitoring along with examples from classroom sequences; (2) provide a setting for teachers to classify student behaviors into these categories; (3) provide teacher trainees with a simulated experience which approximates the task of monitoring in a classroom with multiple groups; and (4) develop the skill of monitoring over increasingly complex demands.

The Concepts

Monitoring involves a combination of human capacities and abilities. At least one of these is the possession of an adequate set of categories with which to organize the many behaviors that are observed. Most behaviors in the normal classroom can be sorted into five categories of behavior. Behavior can be either On-Task or Off-Task and it can be either Interactive or Isolated (non-interactive). In some cases, a behavior may be labeled as Intrusive.

On-Task and Off-Task Behaviors. Student behaviors that have outward appearance of being related to the task as defined by the teacher are considered to be on-task. The nature of on-task behaviors, by definition, vary considerably with the type of task. Thus, under some classroom conditions, discussion may be considered as on-task behavior. However, in the context of test taking, the same behavior might be considered as off-task. Thus, students' behaviors that have

the appearance of not being relevant or being non-conducive to the task as defined by the teacher are considered to be off-task.* Off-task behavior may or may not demand teacher intervention. This point will be elaborated upon later.

Interactive and Isolated Behaviors. On-task and off-task behaviors can be interactive or isolated. Student behaviors that occur in conjunction with, or in response to another person in the classroom (either student or teacher) are defined as interactive. Student behaviors that are predominently non-interactive or are engaged in by a student alone are termed isolated. Both interactive and isolated behavior can be appropriate (or inappropriate) in a given class depending upon the task defined in that class.

Intrusive Behaviors. Student behaviors that interfere with, disrupt, or inhibit on-task behaviors of others in the class are described as intrusive. It is in this category that most behaviors usually classified as disruptive are categorized. Intrusive behavior may be most likely to emerge from off-task interactive behaviors but can reasonably emerge from any of the four previous categories.

The relationship among these five categories is depicted in Figure 1. It may be argued that the classification scheme is overly simple. However, repeated use has shown that it is deceptively so.

One of the misleading characteristics of Figure 1 is that it implies that all the behaviors described are somehow independent and

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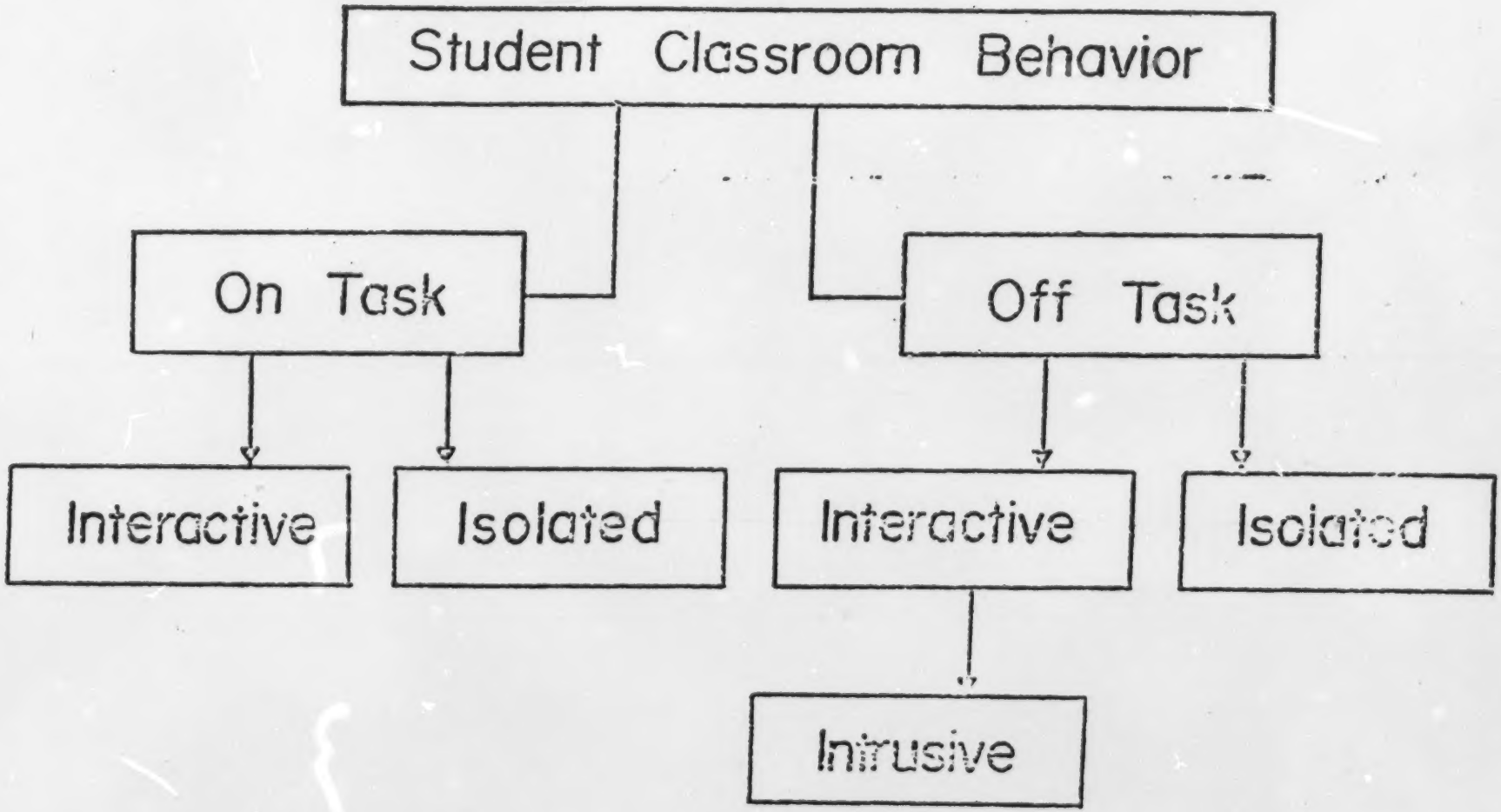
*Note, Semmel and his associates[8] use a slightly different definition for on-task and off-task behavior. They prefer to say a student is "doing what he is supposed to be doing" or "not doing what he is supposed to be doing."


Student Classroom Behavior
On Task
Off Task
Interactive
Isolated
Interactive
Isolated
Intrusive

discrete. For example, it implies that a student's behavior is either on-task or off-task. That may or may not be true. The nature of a learning task may be such that a student can be involved in both on-task and off-task behaviors at the same time. For example, in the art class shown in the protocol films, a student may be simultaneously working on an art project while talking to his neighbor about some irrelevant activity. Thus, while the overt behavior of painting or sculpting is on-task, the overt verbal behavior of talking to a friend about some activity other than the task at hand is indicative of off-task behaviors. As the task demands of the class increase or become more difficult the likelihood of this occurring decreases,[9] but there are a variety of tasks that occur within a classroom that may not demand total commitment to on-task behavior. Finally, while more elaborate categorization schemes may provide greater precision for psychological or educational research, this scheme offers the advantage of being easily remembered by the classroom teacher and thereby useful for decision making.

Variations in Behavior

A variety of on-task and off-task behaviors typically displayed by children is not only typical but may be necessary for effective learning. Consider for the moment an adult (yourself) in a teachers' conference, a PTA meeting, a classroom, etc. How much of an hour is spent by that adult in on-task behavior? Sometimes more, sometimes less. As a participant in a meeting one is likely to spend time

"doodling," writing notes to a friend, making comments to a neighbor, counting the cracks in the wall, etc. We, as adults, cannot maintain our attention on one thing for extended periods of time without thinking of other important or unimportant things. Yet as teachers, we often ask children to do precisely what we cannot. We must recognize that task irrelevant behaviors are inevitable and are probably necessary psychologically. Further, in most cases, off-task behaviors are transitory and, as is the case of our own adult behavior, a student may return to on-task behavior with no teacher intervention. The question remains, however, how much off-task behavior is permissable. What rate of irrelevant behavior are we willing to allow? What is the point at which off-task behaviors become unacceptable?

Base Rate

To use information about the balance between on- and off-task behavior the teacher must first determine an acceptable base rate. That is how much off-task as compared to on-task or how much interactive as opposed to isolated behavior is acceptable? At least two major factors enter into the identification of those base rates. First, the nature of task; second, the tolerance levels of the individual teacher.

In any given task, alteration between on-task and off-task behavior will emerge. There is some ratio of on-task to off-task behavior under which learning progresses well enough that teacher intervention is unnecessary. However, the ratio between on-task and off-task behaviors may reach an unacceptable level requiring teacher

intervention. The point at which intervention may be necessary may be very different for a lesson in multiplication of fractions and a lesson in creative drama. The acceptable amount of interactive behavior may be low during a test but high during a discussion of current events.

Teachers vary in their ability to handle "noise" in the classroom. One teacher may be able to effectively conduct a class with a dozen activities going on in small groups with considerable intergroup and intragroup discussion, while another teacher prefers to have less interaction. The point at which the former would intervene would be different from the point at which the latter would intervene. However, equal amounts of learning may be present under both conditions. Each teacher, however, works within his or her own limits. Further, an individual teacher's limits may change from time to time. On one day a teacher may be able to handle a situation that might be described by an observer as controlled chaos while on the next day, when a teacher has a headache, or stomach trouble, may be able to stand much less.

The point is this, before a teacher can make any reasonable evaluation of the status of a class, he or she must first have a standard against which to evaluate its acceptability or unacceptability.

Simultaneous Scanning of Groups

During an actual class, a teacher may be asked to monitor the ongoing behaviors of a variety of children at any given time. That demand may be such that he or she must monitor behaviors in distinctly separate groups within the same classroom. A teacher may be monitoring or scanning behaviors in one group while scanning behaviors in a second group at the same time. The extent to which must monitor more than two groups increases the difficulty of the task. Kounin[5] found that teachers who could "overlap" or engage inseveral activities simultaneously in their classroom, had fewer students off-task and a lower rate of student deviancy than did teachers who could not. Schumm[3] attempted to validate Kounin's concept of "overlapping" and its relationship to classroom management and found that, among student teachers the ability to process multiple-attention tasks was significantly related to successful classroom management.

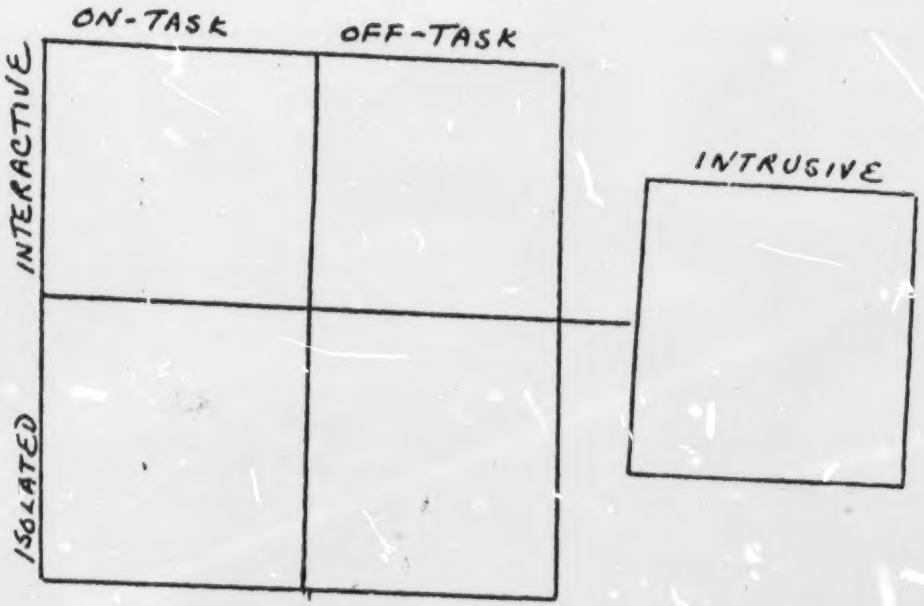
Monitoring student classroom behavior requires the possession of a meaningful set of categories with which to describe student behavior, the ability to identify examples of those behaviors in the context of classroom activity, and the ability to classify student behaviors from multiple groupings.

How to Use the Materials

The three films in the package "Monitoring Classroom Behavior" are sequenced to create improved skill in observing and classifying student behavior. Since monitoring is a skill, we attempted to develop the package with reference to skill learning principles.

In Monitoring Classroom Behavior: Part I, the narrator first specifies the importance of monitoring for maintaining a smooth running classroom. The settings of the films are then described, i.e., a third and a tenth grade class are engaged in art and science activities respectively. Each class is further split into two groups. The five categories of student behavior are then defined and exemplars of each are shown. In the first film, an attempt was made to use relatively "clean" exemplars of each concept. Monitoring is then identified as a skill useful in forming the basis for appropriate intervention. The film ends by suggesting that the trainees discuss the commonly held view that all off-task is disciplinary and demands teacher intervention. As was discussed earlier, that may not be so. The best intervention may be no intervention. I've found, in fact, that pointing to their own waning attention or inability to attend consistently works well.

In Monitoring Classroom Behavior: Part II, two goals are addressed. First, the concepts are presented in a more complex contexts demonstrating the difficulties inherent in classifying human behavior. Second, the trainee is asked to try to use the categories in classifying student behavior. While feedback is provided on the film, an instructor should insure that the trainees have an adequate understanding of the concepts. In the film, the trainees are told to use a scoring sheet of the type displayed on the following page.


ON-TASK
OFF-TASK
INTERACTIVE
ISOLATED
INTRUSIVE

While trying to classify behavior in the filmed segments, the trainee may begin to see the difficulty in handling the task. Clearly monitoring requires practice as does any skill. Among the problems pointed out in the film is that behavior cannot always be clearly put into one category or another since a student may not be exhibiting a clear example of any category of behavior or he may be exhibiting two or more categories of behavior at the same time the feedback frames represent consensus. An instructor using these films is encouraged to feel free to stop the films and reshow sequences as necessary, especially in Film Number 2. It is very important that the trainees feel some comfort with the categories before seeing Film Number 3. The task in the third film is very complex.

In Monitoring Classroom Behavior: Part III, an attempt was made to simulate the condition in an actual classroom where a teacher may be asked to monitor the behaviors of a variety of students at the same time. For example, a teacher may try to scan behaviors in more than one group at the same time. To try to imitate that splitting of attention the two groups from one or the other of the two classrooms are shown at the same time through the use of split screen techniques.

Trainees should be forwarned that the inability to correctly classify all behavior from one segment is not overly important. Rather, one should try to improve his/her ability to become at ease

with the process. In a real classroom a teacher would (and should) use supportive information from a longer sequence of behavior. Further, some behaviors might be viewed differently by a teacher once he/she has more information. Viewing short segments may have pedegogical advantages, but it may be like taking quotes out of context.

In Film Number 2 feedback is provided of how experts classified the behaviors. The experts were all individuals who had considerable experience with the categories. Further, the filmed segments were shown several times and stopped to reconcile any differences. Feedback for Film Number 3 is included in the instructor's manual.

Summary

To reiterate, the package is intended to develop skills appropriate to positive classroom control. It is presumed that Monitoring Student Behaviors is a precursor to effective classroom management.

Monitoring Classroom Behavior

is available through:

PMS Educational Media

Louisville, Kentucky